

Washington, DC - Congressman Charlie Gonzalez (TX-20) issued the following statement this evening:

“Over a year after the American people demanded change in Washington, Congress has worked hard to lead our country in a new direction. Much remains to be accomplished, however, and as we begin what will surely be a contentious election year, we must keep our focus on our most important responsibility: serving the best interests of the American people. I'm hopeful that after tonight the President will answer this call by joining Congress as we seek solutions to the difficulties we face at home and abroad.

As President Bush discussed, our current economic downturn requires swift action, and tomorrow the House will vote on a bipartisan economic stimulus package that will cut taxes for 117 million families. But while this stimulus package will give money directly back to consumers, and their spending can jumpstart our struggling economy, our work isn't finished. This stimulus package is a stopgap measure and must serve as the foundation for a comprehensive solution that addresses additional looming economic concerns. The abuses of sub-prime lending and the resulting credit crunch must also be addressed as part of a larger effort to prevent further economic downturn. As he has done in recent weeks, I'm hopeful the President will continue to approach Congress with willingness to compromise on economic policies so that we can change the course of our current economic decline.

Similarly, our foreign policy also requires swift and drastic change. But while most of the world knows we need a change in the President's Iraq policy, we did not hear him lay out a new strategy this evening. It has been more than a year since the Baker-Hamilton Commission recommended a new direction in Iraq, and over a year after the President announced plans to escalate the war with more troops, but the same problems remain in Iraq today because we've yet to see a fundamental change in the President's policy. The Iraqis' self-inflicted sectarian differences are preventing them from building on the hard fought successes of troops and accordingly, we can't continue our commitment to an open ended strategy in Iraq that has already cost us thousands of lives. We can not simply call for a reduction of troops to “pre-surge levels.” That does not signal the change in policy that is desperately needed; it signals a regression to the ways of a policy that was flawed from its inception.

The situation in Iraq requires political and diplomatic resolve that only the Iraqi people themselves can provide; these problems cannot be solved by our military regardless of whether we send 1,000 or 100,000 more troops to Iraq. The most genuine display of support for our troops is to take them out of harm's way but unfortunately, the President has yet to lay out a plan for bringing them home.

While Congress has accomplished much over the past year, a great deal remains to be done. It's important to note that many of our achievements, from raising the minimum wage, providing historic increases in funding for veterans' healthcare, enacting stringent lobbying and ethics

reforms, and implemented the 9/11 Commission's recommendations to make our country safer, generated significant bipartisan support. As a result, each of these accomplishments should serve as a foundation for future progress as we move into 2008. The President plays a critical role here, and I'm hopeful that his actions will match tonight's rhetoric as we move forward. In recent weeks we've already seen what we can achieve with a touch of bipartisanship and the willingness to compromise, and I am hopeful that this trend, with the President's support, continues throughout the year."

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